

VISIT...

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**1
OCT**

IRON FIST

UNLEASHED

HE'S GONE BEYOND
DEATH
TO FIND HIS FATHER'S
KILLERS—BUT THIS
TIME, HE MAY NOT
RETURN!

DIRECT EDITION

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OB1

THE BLADE IS
RAZOR SHARP.

THE SCREAM IS
TEN TIMES
SHARPER.

NO! NO!
GET AWAY FROM
ME, YOU MANIACS!
GET AWAY!

C'MON,
ICE... PLEASE
DON'T STRAGGLE
SO... PLEASE...

LISTEN
TO YOUR
BROTHER, ICE
AUGUSTINE...

...BE CALM
AND ACCEPT
YOUR DUTY.

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ECTOKID unnatural causes!

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YOU ARE
CHUCKY TO
SERVE US...

...AND TO
SERVE US
YOU MUST
SUBMIT.

WHAT THE
CARDINAL IS TRYING
TO POINT OUT,
FRIEND, IS THAT WE
OF THE EXFURGATORIUS
HAVE A LITTLE
PROBLEM.

YOU MADE A
RECKLESS MISTAKE
WHEN YOU KILLED LEO
MELHART. TRUTH IS,
WE NEVER WANTED
HIM DEAD.

B-BUT
SENATOR,
WHY? YOU'VE GOT
THAT BLASTED
AURAT THING
WE MADE!

WHY
SO WE
HAVE...

...THE
AURAT!

LEO MELHART'S
MASTERPIECE. THE
KEY TO THE RESOURCES
WE SEEK. WITH IT, WE
CAN OPEN A CONDUIT
INTO THE ECTOSPHERE,
AND TAP ITS LIMIT-
LESS POWER...

...BUT THE DEVICE
IS AS INTRICATE AS
IT IS PRECIOUS.

WE NEED
MELHART TO
OPERATE IT.

THAT'S
IMPOSSIBLE!
HE'S DEAD... BEYOND
THE VEIL... LOST IN
THE STINKING
ECTOSPHERE! HOW
CAN YOU HOPE TO
FIND HIM
UNLESS...

YOU WILL FIND HIM FOR US... AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO REACH THE OTHER SIDE...

NO!!!

THE DEATH SCREAM ECHOES THROUGH THE IRON BUTTRESSES OF THE NIGHTMARE AND IS LOST IN THE RAGING STORM OUTSIDE...

THEN SILENCE FALLS ON THE OFF-SHORE GANTLUM OF THE EXPLORATIONS, A SILENCE BROKEN BY THE RASPING VOICE OF THE CARDINAL...

NOT AS FORMAL A RITUAL AS I'D HAVE LIKED, BUT TIME IS SHORT. NOW WE HAVE A MAN ON THE INSIDE...

...DON'T WE, ICE?

YOU WILL FIND HIM FOR US... AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO REACH THE OTHER SIDE...

NO!!!

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...DON'T WE, ICE?

YOU WILL FIND HIM FOR US... AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO REACH THE OTHER SIDE...

NO!!!

THE DEATH SCREAM ECHOES THROUGH THE IRON BUTTRESSES OF THE HEAVENBASE AND IS LOST IN THE RAGING STORM OUTSIDE...

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...DON'T WE, ICE?

YOU WILL FIND HIM FOR US... AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO REACH THE OTHER SIDE...

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YOU WILL FIND HIM FOR US... AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO REACH THE OTHER SIDE...

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NOT AS FORMAL A RITUAL AS I'D HAVE LIKED, BUT TIME IS SHORT. NOW WE HAVE A MAN ON THE INSIDE...

...DON'T WE, ICE?

NEW ORLEANS, THE
FRENCH QUARTER.

YOU DON'T SURVIVE
LONG ON THESE
STREETS UNLESS
YOU FOLLOW THE
RULES:

WATCH
YOUR
BACK.

ON OTHERS' TURF,
SHARE YOUR TAKE
OR RISK YOUR LIFE.

AND WHEN TO
FIGHT.

OKAY,
GUYS... I
KNOW THE
STREET
CODE...

HE FEELS THE ECTO-
FLASH BLEED OUT
TO TAKE THE SHAPE
OF HIS DESIRE
INVOLVING TO HIS
ATTACKERS...

...IN YOUR
TERRITORY,
WHAT'S
MINE...

...GETS
SHARED!

ON THESE STREETS, YOU
HAVE TO FOLLOW THE RULES
...UNLESS, LIKE PEEK, HANDED,
YOU HAVE THE POWER TO
MAKE YOUR OWN.

HEY,
ONE-EYE!
WHAT'S IN
THE BAG,
HALF-
BREED?

KNOW
WHEN TO
FEAR.

HE'S GOTTEN BETTER
AT MANIPULATING HIS
SOUL - STUFF IN THE
PAST WEEKS OF PRACTICE.

FOR WHAT HE'S GOT
PLANNED, HE'S GOING
TO NEED IT.

Y-YOU'RE
DEAD,
BOY!

DEAD!

THEY'RE
HALF-RIGHT.
DEX IS HALF-
DEAD.

IT WASN'T TILL ADOLESCENCE
THAT DEX LEARNED HE HAD
BEEN FATHERED BY A GHOST.

THAT HERITAGE GAVE
HIM THE POWER TO
SEE INTO THE NEXT
AFTER...

... AND CONTROL
OVER ECTOPLASM.

THESE DAYS,
HE USES THE
TALENTS OF
THE DEAD
TO KEEP HIM
IN THE LAND
OF THE
LIVING.

SOMETIMES,
MY SHEER
STYLE
IMPRESSES
EVEN ME...

SOON
BE HOME
AND DRY...

... SAFE
AND
SOUND.



...INTO THE
ECTOSPHERE.

IT'S A WORLD
UNKNOWN TO
MORTAL MAN,
FOREVER OUT
OF SIGHT.

BUT NOT TO GEX. HE
CAN SEE BEYOND
INTO THE GHOST SHADOW
OF REALITY...

...LEAVE HIS
BODY BEHIND...

AT
LAST...

...AND SET FOOT
BEHIND
THE VEIL.

AUGUSTINE?
YOU MURDERING
PIECE OF
FILTH!

... I WAS
BEGINNING
TO THINK
YOU'D
NEVER
GET HERE.
MUNGO.

I'LL
BREAK YOUR
STINKING
H--

WAIT! I
DON'T WANT
TO FIGHT YOU...
I WANT
YOUR HELP.



"...GRINSE THE
SOUL - BROKER
HAS HIM."

THAT'S
KEEP GRINSE,
DEXY-BOY.

I BEAT THE
SECRET OF A
WAY IN OUTTA
ONE O' GRINSE'S
SOUL - COLLECTOR
BOYS.

I'LL BE
STRAIGHT WITH
YOU, THE
EXPURGATORIUS
KILLED ME SO I
COULD COME
HERE AND FIND
MELHART FOR 'EM.

BUT, Y'KNOW,
A KNIFE IN THE
HEART MAKES A
MAN RETHINK HIS
ALLEGIANCES.

I WANT TO
CHARGE THE
EXPURGATORIUS.
MELHART CAN HELP
ME DO THAT, BUT
SEEIN' AS I KILLED
HIM, I NEED YOU
TO CONVINCE HIM
I'M ON THE
LEVEL.

THE
MOMENT
YOU TRY YOUR
OLD TRICKS,
I'LL TAKE
YOU APART.

TRUST
ME,
BOY!

SUCKER...

DO THAT
FOR ME... AND
I'LL SHOW YOU
THE WAY IN
THERE.



OH-HO!
I'M AMAZED
HOW A SON'S
LOVE FOR HIS
PAPA CAN MAKE
HIM FORGIVE
SO MUCH.

WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN
FILTH?



C'MON,
BOY! 'SAT
BEST YOU
CAN DO?

IN THIS PLACE
STRENGTH IS WHAT
YOU WILL IT TO
BE. THE SPIRIT
FORM IS DRIVEN
BY THE WILL-
POWER BEHIND
IT.

GUESS
I HAVE A
STRONG
WILL. HOW
'BOUT
YOU?



MELHART'S NO
GOOD GUY,
MUNGO. 'FORE
HE Sired
YOU, HE WAS
ONE OF THE
EXPURGATORIUS
HIMSELF.

CALLED
HIMSELF
THE
SCIENTIST.

COME ON! WHY
D'YU THINK THEY'VE
BEEN AFTER HIM? THE
SECT WANTED
ESOTERIC POWER.
THEY'D MADE CONTACT
WITH GRUNGE THROUGH
A SEANCE.

NO
WAY!



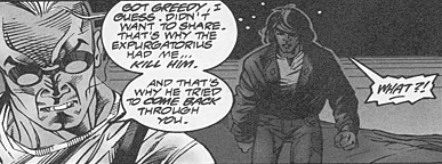
GRUNGE TOLD
MELHART THE SECRETS
TO FINISH THE
AHRAT.

THE
PRICE WAS
MELHART'S
SOUL!

I CAN
TAKE CARE OF
MYSELF. DAD
MADE SURE
OF THAT.



OH, YES! HE WAS THE
STAR PLAYER BACK
THEN. BUT ONCE HE HAD
THE AHRAT, HE FELL
OUT WITH 'EM... LEFT
TO DO HIS OWN THING.



GOT GREEDY, I
GUESS. DIDN'T
WANT TO SHARE.
THAT'S WHY THE
EXPURGATORIUS
HAD ME...
KILL HIM.

AND THAT'S
WHY HE TRIED
TO COME BACK
THROUGH
YOU.

WHAT?!



STILL SILENCE
REIGNS WITHIN
THE FORTRESS.

THE AIR IS RANK,
AND STAINED WITH
OILY SMOKE.

AND THE SOULS
HERE ARE
DARKER STILL.

HI
THERE.

EH?

WHATH'
HECK?

SWANK
LUKK!

YEE-
NAN! POP
GOES THE
NECK-BONE!

AN'
AS FOR
YOU...

SHRRINK!

DEX OBEYS, HIS
HEART FOUNGING.

HE MAY BE
UNLOCKING MORE
THAN JUST A
PRISON DOOR...

OPEN
THE CELL,
DEXY. I'LL
HIDE THE
STIFFS.





HIS HEAD SPINS LIKE
A CAROUSEL...

HE HAS NO IDEA HOW
LONG HE'S BEEN OUT.

ALL HE KNOWS
IS THAT ICE
BETRAYED HIM
YET AGAIN...

...AND ICE WAS
TELLING THE
TRUTH ABOUT
HIS FATHER.

LEO MELHART IS AS EVIL AS
THE REST OF THEM. DEX
AND HIS MOTHER MUST'VE
BEEN JUST PAWNS IN
MELHART'S HANDS.

AND NOW ICE AND
HIS FATHER HAVE
LEFT HIM TO DIE...

...IN THE CLUTCHES OF
THE SOUL-BROKER'S
KILLERS!

HE'S
SPRING
MELHART!
WASTE
HIM!

DEX REMEMBERS HIS
FIRST ADVENTURE IN
THE ECDSHERE.

THEN, HE WONDERED,
WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU
ARE KILLED IN THE
WORLD BEYOND DEATH?

HIS ANSWER: 'YOU DON'T
WANT TO KNOW.'



ECTOPLASMIC
CROSSFIRE
CHASES HIM
ALONG THE
RAPTERS...

...BUT HIS WILL TO
SURVIVE IS DRIVEN
BY ANGER AND HURT.

HE FINDS A STRENGTH
HE HAS NOT KNOWN
BEFORE...



...ACROSS
THE ROOF-
SPACE...



...AND ONTO
SOLID STONE.



THEY SURGE UP
TO MEET HIM...



...AND LEAPS...



...FROM ALL
SIDES.

OH,
BROTHER!



UNTIL THERE'S
NOWHERE LEFT
TO RUN...

...AND NO
DESIRE TO.

BREAKING DEMON-
BONE... THAT FEELS
GOOD ENOUGH TO
HIM.

COME ON, YOU
UGLY SUCKERS!
COME ON -
WHO'S NEXT?

LET ME AT
HIM! LET ME
THROUGH! I'LL
CRACK THE
MORROW FROM
HIS WRETHED
BONES!

OH,
WONDERFUL!
GRUDGE!

YOU'RE
MINE, BROT!
THANKS TO YOU,
YOUR FATHER'S
FLOWN MY
GRASP!

BUT YOU'RE
MINE! AND YOU'LL
PAY HIS DEBT
WITH YOUR
SOUL!

SO THAT'S WHY THEY
LEFT ME HERE... TO
COVER THE CHECK!

THANKS
A BUNCH,
DAD!

IS THAT
ALL I AM TO
YOU... A
DOWNPAYMENT
ON YOUR SOUL-
DEBT TO THIS
RAY HARRYHAUSEN
REJECT?

WELL, IT'S
A SAFE BET HE
WON'T LET ME
WASH DISHES
INSTEAD...

THERE'S NOTHING
THERE! SOMETHING
MUST'VE HAPPENED
TO MY BODY ON
THE OTHER SIDE!

I'M JUST
A GHOST...
AND I'M
TRAPPED
HERE!
OH, WELL...

COME ON,
YOU LITTLE
FREAK! DO
YOUR
WORST!

OH MY
GOD! I
CAN'T SHIFT
BACK INTO
MY BODY!

...SO I
GUESS I
BETTER GET
OUT OF
HE...





ON-OOGEF!



D-DROPPING
ME... LETTING
ME GO...

...BUT
WHY?

NO!

NOT YOU
AGAIN! HAVEN'T
YOU DONE
ENOUGH TO ME?

TAKE HIM!
TAKE THE BRAT
IF YOU WANT
HIM...



...JUST LEAVE
ME IN
PEACE!

GRINSE...
RUNNING
SCARED?

BUT WHAT
WOULD HE
HAVE...



...TO BE
SCARED...

...ABOUT?



THEY SLITHER IN THROUGH
THE KEEP WALLS, PARTING
THE STONEMASS AS IF IT
WERE HEAVY DRAPES.

THERE IS NO SOUND, JUST
THE COLD AND STERILE
SMELL OF SOME AIRLESS,
COSSING ELSEWHERE.

FEAR SEIZES
DEX'S BATTERED
SOUL.

THESE ARE ETHERITES...
THE SILENT, TERRIBLE
SENTINELS OF THE LIGHT
THAT LIES BEYOND THE
ECOSPHERE.

AND DEX REALIZES
NOW THAT HE IS BUT
A GHOST. THEY HAVE
COME TO CARRY
HIM OFF TO THAT
PLACE.



THE VAST EBONY
HAND UNFOLDS...

OKAY! OKAY! I'LL
COME QUIETLY!
THERE'S NO NEED
FOR VIOLENCE--

--HMM?

...AND IN ITS PALM IS
THE LAST THING DEX
EVER THOUGHT HE'D
SEE AGAIN.



M-M-MOM!

DEX,
MY SON.



OH, MOM!

THEY
BROUGHT ME
BACK, DEX, BACK
FROM THE LIGHT.
THEY WANT ME
TO TELL YOU...
OF THE
DANGER.



DANGER IF I KNOW
ALL ABOUT THAT,
GRUNGE WAS
TRYING TO...



NO, DEX.
MORE THAN
THAT.



THEY BROUGHT
ME HERE AS A
MEDIUM TO
COMMUNICATE
THEIR MOTIVES
TO YOU.

I'M JUST
GRATEFUL FOR
THIS CHANCE TO
SEE YOU
AGAIN.



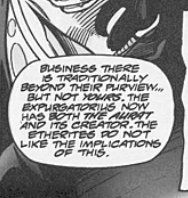
THE
ETHERITES
WOULDN'T NORMALLY
INTERVENE, BUT
THEY ARE
CONCERNED WITH
DEVELOPMENTS
ON THE MORTAL
PLANE.



THE
EXPURGATORIUS
MUST BE STOPPED
FROM USING THE
AURAT. THE ETHER-
ITES WANT YOU TO
ACT ON THEIR
BEHALF IN THIS
MATTER.



BUT I CAN'T
TRACK MY
PHYSICAL
SELF. I'M
TRAPPED
HERE.



BUSINESS THERE
IS TRADITIONALLY
BEYOND THEIR PURVIEW...
BUT NOT NOW. THE
EXPURGATORIUS NOW
HAS BOTH THE AURAT
AND ITS CREATOR. THE
ETHERITES DO NOT
LIKE THE IMPLICATIONS
OF THIS.



NEITHER OF
THOSE ASSUMPTIONS
IS CORRECT.



THE
ETHERITES TELL
ME YOU CAN'T LOCATE
YOUR BODY BECAUSE
IT HAS BEEN STOLEN
AND HIDDEN.

THEY CAN HELP
YOU FIND IT...

...AND
GIVE YOU
A GREATER
CONTROL
OVER YOUR
BIOTPLASMIC
FORM. BUT
THERE
WILL BE A
PRICE.

THEY CAN?
THAT'S
GREAT...

...I THINK...

HEY,
WATTAWNUTE...

EEARGH!

OH, MUST
THIS BE SO
BRUTAL,
ETHERITES?

OH, I
SEE. YES
...OF
COURSE.

"YOU'RE RE-SHAPING MY SON... RE-CULPATING HIS EOTO-FORM WITH YOUR LIGHT ENERGIES..."

"...YES, I'M SURE DEX WILL REGRET YOU ONCE HE REALIZES WHAT YOU'VE DONE."

"IT'S JUST THAT IT LOOKS SO... PAINFUL..."

"WAAAA!
I FEEL
KIND OF
STRANGE..."

THEY HAVE
RE-MADE YOUR
EOTO-FORM, DEX...
REINFORCED IT
AND LENT YOU SOME
OF THEIR POWER...

"...YOU WILL HAVE
GREATER CONTROL
OF IT NOW... BOTH
HERE AND IN THE
MATERIAL WORLD."

AND NOW
YOU MUST LOOK...
WITH BOTH
YOUR EYES.

IT IS YOUR
LIFELINE, LINKING
YOUR SPIRIT TO
YOUR PHYSICAL
BODY.

WITCHES CALL IT
THE ARIADNE
THREAD; YOU CAN
ONLY SEE IT WHEN
YOU USE YOUR DEAD
AND YOUR LIVING
EYES TOGETHER.

O-O-KAY,
NOW.

HEY! A
THREAD OF
EOTO-ASH
LEADING AWAY
FROM MY
WRIST!



NOW YOU SHOULD GO FOLLOW THE THREAD.

OKAY, BUT FIRST...

...DID YOU KNOW LEO MELHART WAS PART OF THE EXPARGA-TORHS?



YES.

HE WAS A GHOST BY THE TIME I MET HIM OF COURSE, BUT I KNEW HIS PURPOSE. HE WANTED ME TO HELP HIM MAKE YOU... A CHILD OF BOTH SIDES.

HE NEEDED A LIVING TOOL TO USE ON EARTH, SINCE HE WAS EXILED TO THE BOTOSPHERE.



BUT WHEN WE BEGAN TO LOVE EACH OTHER, I SAW THAT DARK PURPOSE CHANGE. THAT WAS WHEN HE BECAME A FATHER YOU SHOULD BE PROUD OF, DEX.

A MAN DEDICATED TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THOSE VILE CREATURES.



I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT. BUT THEN WHY DID HE GO ALONG WITH THAT LIAR AUGUSTINE?

WOULD HE HAVE LEFT YOU ALIVE IF HE'D MEANT YOU HARM?

HE HAD A DEBT TO PAY...



...AW, I DIDN'T KNOW! WATCH FOR ME, MOM.

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN.

THE HERMITAGE...

LEO... SO GOOD
TO HAVE YOU BACK
WITH US.

AND THAT'S A FINE
ECTOPLASMIC BODY
YOU'VE WOVEN FOR
YOURSELF. BY GIVING
YOURSELF FORM LIKE
THAT, YOU'VE PROVEN
THE ALURAT WORKS.

GET TO THE
POINT! WHY HAVE
YOU BROUGHT ME
HERE? WHY DO I
NEED THIS
FACSIMILE BODY?

WE NEED YOUR
SKILLS, LEO, AND
YOU COULD NOT EMPLOY
THEM WITHOUT A HOST
VEHICLE TO GIVE YOU
FORM; UNLIKE ICE
ALGHUSTINE...

...YOU DON'T
HAVE AN OAF
FOR A BROTHER
TO POSSESS
AND INHAERIT
THIS WORLD.

MAYBE I
WOULDN'T HELP YOU.
I HAVEN'T SEEN ANY
PROOF OF THE THREAT
ICE ALGHUSTINE MADE
TO GET ME TO FOLLOW
HIM FROM GRUNGE'S
KEEP.



I WASN'T LYING, MELHART, WHILE I WAS HUNTING YOU IN THE ECOTOSPHERE, BROTHER TOM WAS FETCHING YOUR SON'S GATEPASS FROM ITS RESTING PLACE.



WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?

ALIGN THE AURAT FOR US, OPEN UP A GATE. WE WANT TO ACCESS THE ECOTOSPHERE... AND THE RAY, ECOTYLASIAN POWER, LIES THERE!

CROSS US NOW, AND WE'LL MAKE SURE HE STAYS A GHOST.

POWER? IT'S ALWAYS THE WAY...



...WELL, I CAN OPEN A GATE FOR YOU... BUT ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT THAT KIND OF POWER?



WE KNOW WHAT WE WANT, MELHART.

WE'VE WORKED FOR IT LONG ENOUGH.



YOU KNOW
BEST, I'M
SURE.

VERY
WELL...



EXCELLENT!
MANIPULATOR
...ACTIVATE THE
TURBINES. WE
MUST STRENGTHEN
THE AREA'S
FOCUS!

YES SIR,
CARDINAL!

AS SENIOR
HERE, I WILL BE
FIRST TO
RECEIVE THE
INVESTITURE OF POWER

WITH A THRASHING WHINE
POWERFUL TURBINES ON
THE SEASD CHURN INTO
LIFE...



...RIPPLING THE CHOPPY
WATERS AROUND THE
RIG INTO A WAVERING
BUT UNMISTAKABLE
PATTERN.



THE HERMITAGE NOW SITS AT A
FOCUS OF POWER, CREATED BY
THE ELEMENTAL FURY OF THE
OCEAN ITSELF.



MY GOD
THIS IS TRICKY!
I'M NOT USED
TO ELECTRIC
FINGERS.

BEFORE ANOTHER WORD
CAN BE UTTERED, SEARING
LIGHT EXPLODES INTO
THE GLOOM...

IT'S OPEN!
THE CONDUIT
IS OPEN!

THE LIGHT!
WHAT HAVE YOU
DONE, MELHART? IT'S
TEARING THE
CARDINAL APART!
DESTROYING
HIM!

'DESTROYING'
FRIEND
SENATOR?
NO...

...REMARKS
WOULD BE
A BETTER
WORD...

HI, FOLKS!
D'YOU
MISS ME?

WHOOOPS!
IS THIS A
BAD TIME?

YES! YES!
GIVE ME THE
POWER, TOO!

THIS IS
WACKINESS!
YOU'RE ALL
CRAZY!



MEINHART'S BRAT
HAS RETURNED
TO HIS BODY!

ANGUSTINES!
KILL NUM!









"NOW THAT'S
NOT GOOD."

DEX!
YOU'VE GOT
TO GET TO THE
SHOULDER AND
THROW IT INTO
REVERSE!

I'M KINDA
BUSY,
DAD...

"DEFINITELY,
CATEGORICALLY
NOT GOOD AT
ALL!"



...BESIDES,
WHY SHOULD I
TRUST YOU IF
YOU SOLD OUT
TO THEM!



YOU
GAVE THEM
WHAT THEY
WANTED! YOU
BETRAYED
ME!

I HAD NO
CHOICE! THEY
WERE GOING
TO KILL YOU!

I COULDN'T
LET THEM DO
THAT! I... I
LOVE YOU, SON!

THE JET-STREAM OF
PRESSURED ECTOFLASH
BLASTS THE THING
THAT WAS THE CARDINAL
BACK ACROSS THE
CHAMBER...



... AND DEX DIVES
TOWARDS THE PULSING
AURAT.

OKAY
DAD! I'LL
TRUST YOU ONE
LAST TIME
NOW NOW
DO I DO
THIS?

SHINE THE ORBITS
OUT OF ALIGNMENT!
CLOSE THE CENTRAL
APERTURE!

EASY FOR YOU
TO SAY! GEE!
IT'S RED-
HOT!

TOO LATE, WHELP!
ONCE ACTIVATED THE
AURAT MUST FULLY
CYCLE! IT CAN'T BE
TURNED OFF!

SOMETHING BRINGS...
SWIFTERS LIKE A
GIANT BEAR THROWN
OUT OF TRUE.

THE BLINDING LIGHT FLICKERS
AND BECOMES A TORNADO
OF ENERGY THAT FALLS BACK IN
UPON ITSELF.

IEEEEE
EEEEEE

NO, BUT IT
CAN BE
REVERSED!

THERE!
NOW
MOVE IT
BEFORE--

AND THEN EVERYTHING
COLLAPSES IN AFTER IT.

THE
DEMON'S GONE!
CAN'T WE SHUT
THAT THING
OFF NOW?

I DON'T
KNOW, THAT
TRY TO
HOLD ON!



I HATE TO
SAY IT, DAD...
BUT THERE
DOESN'T SEEM
TO BE MUCH
LEFT TO HOLD
ON T--

"DAD?"

"DAD?"



TAKE IT EASY, DAD. WE'RE
IN THE ECOSPHERE...
SOMEWHERE.

MY BODY'S SAFE--
I JUST NEEDED TO
CHECK ON YOU...

HOW
LONG HAVE
I BEEN
OUT?

SEEMED
LIKE FOREVER.
I THOUGHT YOU
WEREN'T COMING
BACK.

I THINK WE
BEAT THEM. THE
AUGUST EXPLODED...
SOME KIND OF
OVERLOAD.

THE
EXPURGATORIIUS,
THE AUGUSTINES...
THEY'RE ALL
GONE.

THEN IT WAS
WORTH IT.

I NEEDED TO
REBORN MYSELF...
MAKE UP FOR MY
MISTAKES. YOUR
MOTHER'S LOVE
SHOWED ME MY
FAULTS...

"MY FAITH
IN *FEW* SAW ME
THROUGH THE
DARKNESS.



I WAS SO IGNORANT... SO
FEELHARDY... I
SOLD MY GUILT
TO BRINGS FOR
GOD'S SAKE!
WHAT A CRAPPY
THING TO DO.

STILL HE'LL
NEVER GET
IT NOW.

WHY
NOT?



BECAUSE
THEY'VE
COME
FOR IT.

LED.



I'VE
MISSED
YOU, MY
LOVE.

I CAN'T
TAKE THIS. I
GET YOU TOGETHER
AGAIN... ONLY TO
SAY GOODBYE?







YOU STILL
NEED ME
TO DO--?

SAY
WHAT?
WHAT
THINGS?

THE AURAT'S
NOT BEEN
DESTROYED?
THEN WHERE--?

NO! WHY
WOULD
HE...?

HE'S A
WHAT... A
WHAT? WHAT
DOES HE
WANT IT
FOR?

OH, NO... I
CAN'T!!

I CAN'T
DO THAT!!

I
WOULDN'T
STAND A
CHANCE,
WOULD
I?

DON'T
MISS THE
NEXT
EXCITING
ECTOKID
SPECIAL!

AS DEX BEGINS A
QUEST THAT WILL TAKE
HIM TO THE ENDS OF
THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT!

MEANWHILE... WRITE
YOUR THOUGHTS ON DEX'S
BOLD NEW DIRECTION!

ECTOKID % MARVEL
387 PARK AVE. SO.
NY, NY 10016

"Saint in Neon"

BY Elaine Lee

Sally Kate Piner slumped back into the shadows, pressed her aching shoulder blades into the dirty brick wall, and tenderly stroked the barrel of her daddy's Smith and Wesson 38 Special Police Positive with the middle finger of her right hand. It reminded her of her childhood, this gun. She closed her eyes against the flashing neon light, and pressed the butt of the gun to her face. The smell of powder and metal put her instantly home in Tennessee, shooting wooden pins off the clothesline in back of the house, and making daddy laugh. Sally Kate lowered the gun. She looked at the flashing sign. Then, she looked, for perhaps the thousandth time, at the strange graffiti scrawled on the alley wall: "Help me, Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"

Her cracked lips moved silently as her empty eyes scanned the scrawl. Dimly, a lone thought worked its way to the edge of her conscious mind. "My Saint," said the thought, "A saint for the lost, the abandoned... and for murderers like me."

She'd been in the alley for hours, waiting for "him" to leave his seedy room and walk out the main door of the fleabag hotel. Of course, she knew the man's name, had known it for... how many years? Eight? Ten? But, since that night... the night she'd come to understand what "he" had done to Jess... to her baby... well, she couldn't wrap her mind around that name anymore. Now, it was always "him" or "that monster."

The knowledge of his crime and the daily care of her ruined child had eaten away at Sally Kate, turned her into a bitter, obsessive woman. Her mind filled only with trial transcripts, police reports, and the dates of "his" parole hearings. Her husband, unable to reach her through the great wall of her grief, had finally left her in that house of pain. Yes... her husband had failed her and the laws of her country had failed her, and her church! Her church had failed her, too... when they couldn't explain how a loving God could let "that monster" brutalize her child. "Help me, Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"

Sally Kate saw "him" now... through the dirty glass door, just beneath the flashing hotel sign —HOTEL NO-TELL, in a ring of blinking pink neon. He was talking to the night clerk and smiling, maybe telling a joke or just pretending to be human but Sally Kate knew better. "The monster" would walk out in a moment. He'd cross the street and she'd have to shoot him... do the job the State should have done and didn't. "Oh, god, oh help me! Help me Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"

Her desperate eyes rolled heavenward. A flash of neon! Hot pink lightning seared its message—HOTEL NO-TELL—into her starving retinas. Then, NOISE like all the screams of the damned filled her head. She would have covered her ears, but she needed both hands to lift the gun. She lifted it and she tried to aim, tried to see "him" through the pink rings of light that danced before her eyes. "Is that you, you monster?"

"Yes," said a voice like a cool rain riding the fiery breath of angels, "a monster is just what I am."

But, it wasn't "him." Not her "monster." A handsome young man—with an angel's face and a demon's eyes—was emerging, god-like, from the pink mandala of flashing neon light: HOTEL, a mantra to the homeless, NO-TELL, to the faithless, a hymn of faith. But, for this one, for Saint Sinner, the glowing circle of gas-filled glass, made holy by the power of human need, was a gate to every world and time.

"Who are you?", Sally stammered, already half-knowing, as she looked at Saint Sinner down the barrel of daddy's gun.

He turned his demon eyes on the woman, exposing the ornate scarring that covered the side of his face, like a beautiful wound. "I am the answer to your prayers."

Then, he was reaching out to grasp the gun's barrel and she was letting go and suddenly, his hands were on her, filling her head, her whole

being, with NOISE and LIGHT. And, in that moment of loud/bright joining, she knew! She knew Philip Fetter, the boy he'd once been, before the coming of the demon, Runesmith. Through the Saint's mind, she felt the demon enter the boy, enter as a mind-rending sound, forcing the boy to kill and kill and kill again. Next, she felt how the Angel had come, as a blinding LIGHT, shielding him from the NOISE, yet searing the three spirits into Philip's one flesh... welding them together... a triad, for all time.

Then it was Sally who reached out, searching between these warring spirits, the dark and the light, to hunt for Philip Fetter's human soul saying, "Saint... Saint Sinner... the Man who walks Between."

"Yes... yes... know me," he whispered, moving his hands over her, filling her with his power. "Knowledge heals."

Then Sally started to change—growing smaller, younger, new! The particles of her body sang, and threatened to spin away from her living core. Dying cells regenerated. Middle-aged skin came alive with the bright shine of youth, pink and hot as neon. Bones strengthened. Muscle went supple. Coarse gray hair became golden and soft.

Standing before the demon-eyed man was a pretty female child. She was fair-haired and dimpled and playing dress-up in her mommy's clothes. No sign of pain or hardship had touched the peach-soft cheek. Saint Sinner winked one demon eye then, pocketing her daddy's gun, stepped into the alley's darkness away from the flashing sign, and the girl smiled. She called out to that other man... to "him", across the street, the one coming out the dirty hotel door. "'Scuse me! 'Scuse me, Sir,' she lisped softly, 'I'm lost. Sir. Can you help me, please?'"

The man, with only a hint of the monster moving behind his mild features, smiled widely and moved toward the child. "Yes... yes, of course. Dear," he crooned like milk as he crossed the street, stuffing his twitching fingers into the pockets of his pants. "Here, Dear... come with me right over here... here in the shadows. Shadows are good, Dear. Shadows are my friends..."

But, these shadows weren't friendly. They were packed with anguish. Two vise-like hands were waiting there to clasp the monster's head. The hands began to pulsate and glow, sending twin forces into the man's shaking frame. One, jagged and dark, ripped through his trembling body, a hateful buzz saw, giving birth to a scream. The other burned into him inner-brig, blinding, choking him with unbearable heat, so the infant scream is stillborn, dead in his tightened throat. Through his agony, beneath Saint Sinner's hands, "he" felt himself change. Bones grew brittle, muscles weakened, skin withered. Fast, so fast! And, as the NOISE receded, he heard the child laughing. As the BRIGHTNESS faded he saw her, dimly, through aged eyes.

Crumpled in the alley, very near the laughing child, was a very old man, too old to harm anyone, too old to be a threat. The old man groaned and the child laughed once more, flinging her small body into the happiness dance. She would never be a murderer! He would never harm again! She whirled and stomped, jumping out of her too-big shoes, kicking and spinning, and was finally lifted high off of the ground by the hands of the Saint. He held the child and kissed her.

The NOISE was softer now, like a song, and the LIGHT was spring sun on new leaves. Sally Kate Piner, her child's lips brushing the lips of the Saint, felt herself growing, this time in the right direction. Her limbs lengthened, her body ripened and, as her bare feet stretched to touch the waiting pavement, long-dead feelings surged through her woman's flesh, and she kissed him truly and not as a child!

Saint Sinner started and pushed the woman away, the human blood still hot in his angel's face. "I can't... can't lose myself. The demon, he'll take me... make me do things!" He wheeled away from her, stumbled and ran. She started to follow, to run after and catch him, but a flash of something caught her eye. There, just there, in that window! What was that?

Sally Kate Piner stood frozen on the dingy street, transfixed before the pawnshop window, staring at a reflection... a reflection of a girl no more than twenty. The girl was bathed in pink neon light and she was there... and then not there... and then there, again. "She's so pretty," thought Sally, laughing, as the neon sign flashed on once more. NO-TELL.

"That's right," she thought, laughing again. For the girl was Sally Kate and she was no murderer and she was young again and whole, and... "no... I won't tell anyone!"

She looked, for perhaps the thousandth time, at the strange graffiti scrawled on the alley wall: "Help me, Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"